DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 347 496 CS 009 533

TITLE	10 Ways To Help Your Children Become Better Readers.
INSTITUTION	Illinois Univ., Urbana. Center for the Study of Reading.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	88
CONTRACT	OEG-0087-C1001
NOTE	9p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Education; *Parent Child Relationship; Preschool Education; *Reading; Reading Aloud to Others; *Reading Habits; Reading Material Selection; Television
IDENTIFIERS	*Becoming a Nation of Readers; Center for the Study of Reading IL

ABSTRACT

This short guide, intended for parents, offers 10 suggestions from "Becoming a Nation of Readers," the Report of the National Commission on Reading, along with specific ideas to help children become better readers: (1) help children acquire a wide range of knowledge; (2) talk with children about their experiences; (3) encourage children to think about events; (4) read aloud to children; (5) provide preschool children with writing materials; (6) encourage children to watch television programs that have educational value; (7) monitor how much television children watch; (8) monitor your children's school performance; (9) encourage children to read independently; and (10) continue personal involvement in children's growth as readers. (MS)

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10 Ways to Help Your Children Become Better Readers

The Center for the Study of Reading

The Reading Research and Education Center

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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Parents, Children, and Reading

Suggestions from *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, the Report of the National Commission on Reading

Reading begins in the home. Before they ever go to school, children acquire knowledge that lays the foundation for reading. They learn about objects, events, thoughts, and feelings, and they develop the language skill and vocabulary to express ideas and describe their experiences. As parents, you play a crucial role in laying this foundation because you are your children's:

Guides through a vast and unfamiliar world of people, places, and things.

First teachers about how to express ideas with words and what words mean.

Partners in learning about the fascinating world of written language.

One enduring source of faith and encouragement that they will become good readers.

Once children are in school, their parents' expectations, and the experiences provided by their parents, continue to influence how much and how well children read.

Helping Your Children Become Good Readers

Most children will learn *how* to read. Whether they will become *good readers* depends in large part upon your help and encouragement. As a parent, you can:

1. **Help your children acquire a wide range of knowledge.** When you take your children on shopping trips, walks in the park, and visits to zoos and museums, you help give them the important background knowledge they will need as they learn to read school textbooks. Your children's ability to understand even simple stories can depend upon their having both common and not-so-common knowledge.

2. **Talk with your children about their experiences.** When you talk with your children about their experiences, you help them learn new words and understand what these new words mean. Talking with children also helps them learn from their experiences and use this new knowledge to understand what they are reading. As a result, they will better understand what they are reading.

3. **Encourage your children to think about events.** Ask your children to describe events; this makes them reflect upon experiences and helps them learn to give good descriptions and tell complete stories. These activities help your children learn about how stories are written and better understand what they are reading.

4. **Read aloud to your children.** Reading aloud is probably the single most important activity you can do to encourage your children's success as readers. It is an especially important activity during the preschool years. When you read lots of stories to your children, and look at lots of picture books with them, you are helping them build the store of knowledge they will use when they begin to read in school. The benefits of reading aloud are greatest when you encourage your children to participate in this activity by identifying letters and words and talking about the story and the meaning of words.

5. **Provide your preschool children with writing materials.** Writing is an important way for your children to learn about letters and words. Children are often very eager to learn how to write and you can encourage them by having paper and pencils or crayons in your home and helping them when they start drawing letters. Even when your children are too young to hold a pencil or crayon, you can use devices such as magnetic boards and letters to help them learn about letters and words.

6. **Encourage your children to watch TV programs that have educational value.** Watching television programs that teach about reading and language can have a positive effect on your children's learning. You can make sure they watch these programs regularly. You can also help them learn from these programs by asking questions about the shows and relating what they are seeing to other situations and experiences.

7 **Monitor how much TV your children watch.** Watching quality television programs up to about 10 hours a week can have a slightly positive effect on your children's achievement in school, including their reading achievement. As the number of hours of viewing per week increases, however, TV watching becomes a negative influence on your children's school work. Most children who watch television 20 or more hours a week don't do well in school.

8 **Monitor your children's school performance.** When you visit your children's teachers, observe their classrooms, find out about the reading programs in their schools, and participate in home-school programs, you can get a good idea of how your children are doing in school and how you can help them become better students. Research shows that children tend to be more successful readers when their parents have an accurate view of their school work.

9 **Encourage your children to read independently.** The amount of reading your children dó outside of school influences how well they will read in school. Most American children don't read very much during their free time. One of your top priorities as a parent should be to encourage your children to spend more time reading. You can help them read more by having plenty of books in your home and visiting the library regularly.

10 **Continue your personal involvement in your children's growth as readers.** Set a good example for your children by reading newspapers, magazines, and books. Suggest reading as a leisure time activity and make sure your children have time for reading. You may want, for example, to establish a bedtime hour after which reading is the only activity permitted other than going to sleep.

If you would like to learn more about reading and reading instruction, copies of *Becoming a Nation of Readers* are available at your local library or may be ordered with the attached order form.

Prepared for the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) under cooperative agreement #G0087C1001 with the U.S. Department of Education.

This publication was produced by the Office of the Associate Chancellor for Public Affairs/Office of Publications in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Reading.

Recommended Reading

Commission on Reading. (1985). *Becoming a nation of readers.* Urbana, IL: Center for the Study of Reading, University of Illinois.

Copperman, P. (1986). *Taking books to heart.* Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.

Fadiman, C. (1985). *The world treasury of children's literature.* Boston: Little, Brown and Co.

Russell, W.F. (1984). *Classics to read aloud to your children.* New York: Crown Publishers.

Russell, W.F. (1986). *More classics to read aloud to your children.* New York: Crown Publishers.

Savage, T. (1985). *The chalkboard in the kitchen.* New York: Dodd Mead.

Trelease, J. (1985). *The read-aloud handbook.* New York: Penguin Books.

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